



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy

Ninth Street Office Building / 8th Floor
202 North Ninth Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219-3402
(804) 692-3200 FAX (804) 692-3237
www.dmme.virginia.gov

For Immediate Release

April 9, 2005

Contact: Mike Abbott (276) 523-8146

Cell: (276) 356-3405

ARBOR DAY EVENT FOCUSES ON VIRGINIA'S PARTICIPATION IN APPALACHIAN REGIONAL REFORESTATION INITIATIVE

- Initiative's goal is the planting of more native hardwood trees on active and abandoned coal mines in Appalachian region. -

Keokee, VA - Virginia coal industry representatives, state and federal agency officials and students from Keokee and St. Charles Elementary Schools gathered on an abandoned mine land site Friday to show that trees are a valuable renewable resource and therefore, a good investment for the environment and Appalachian communities. The Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy (DMME) and federal Office Surface Mining (OSM) represented the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) at the Arbor Day Celebration to promote the planting of high-value, native hardwood trees on mined land in Appalachia. Cosponsors of the event included the Virginia Department of Forestry, Virginia Mining Association and Sigmon Coal Company.

The ARRI used the event as an outdoor forum to encourage Southwest Virginia coal industry representatives to adopt the forestry reclamation approach and to discuss how to remove existing cultural, technical and regulatory barriers to forestry reclamation. Tree planting demonstrations, in which the students participated, took place on the abandoned mine land (AML) site, which is being reclaimed by Sigmon Coal Company through a no-cost agreement with DMME. Sigmon is using excess spoil material from an active mining operation to reclaim AML highwalls. Approximately 7,500 linear feet of highwall have been backfilled, regraded, reseeded and are ready for tree planting this spring.

The Virginia Department of Forestry and the Ruffed Grouse Society provided DMME with tree species recommendations. The Department of Forestry also assisted in providing tree seedlings and guidance on planting species such as red oak, yellow poplar, Washington Hawthorne, crabapple, buttonbush and white pine.

DMME Deputy Director Benny Wampler opened the event and Division of Mined Land Reclamation officials Richard Davis explained the project and led the tree planting exercise. Federal Office of Surface

Mining (OSM) Director Jeff Jarrett spoke briefly about the importance of using proper reforestation techniques on mined lands. OSM Natural Resource Specialist Steve Rathbun gave a presentation about the ARRI, and Sigmon Coal Company representative David Robinson discussed his company's involvement in the project.

The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative is a multi-state effort of the Appalachian region states the federal Office of Surface Mining designed to promote and encourage the planting of more economically viable trees on active and abandoned mined lands. ARRI promotes the use of the five step Forest Reclamation Approach (FRA), which recommends the creation of a suitable rooting medium; loosely grading topsoil and topsoil substitutes; using native species and non-competitive ground cover; planting types of trees - early succession species for wildlife and soil stability and commercially valuable crop trees and using proper tree planting techniques. Virginia Tech professor Dr. James Burger, who is a participant in the ARRI has contributed information to the Initiative through his extensive research on forestry reclamation on mined land through the Powell River Project.

ARRI seeks to raise the level of awareness among state and federal government agencies, mining companies, environmental groups, academia, and other public and private groups about the importance of using the forest reclamation approach. It also endeavors to promote the environmental and economic benefits of reforestation, support the development of new technology for growing trees on mined lands, develop incentives for reforestation on mined lands, and overcome perceived barriers for planting trees on mined areas. Cultural barriers include the belief that trees are not a productive land use and take too long to grow. Technical barriers involve issues related to soil compaction that can inhibit tree growth, competition from other plants used in mined land reclamation, and developing a suitable growing medium. The final barrier is the perception that federal and state reclamation laws and regulations prohibit forestry reclamation.

Events like the Arbor Day Celebration are being used to emphasize the importance and benefits of forest reclamation to the people of the Appalachian region. Trees are a good investment and high quality timber can offer substantial revenue for landowners and job opportunities for local residents. Forestland is environmentally important. Forests help minimize soil erosion and remove carbon dioxide from the air. Forests also provide habitat for wildlife and diverse plant species and help conserve water resources.

###